

BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCES MONTGOMERY

"Just for sport I am going to enumerate some of the things that you could make into a dandy lecture," said Button. "You could begin with your experiences in the circus when you were young and before you were married. Then when you were hunting for the kids the time they ran away and were carried off to Constantinople and you thought them dead. Next, some of the tales you told when you came home from Japan after being in the war between the Japanese and the Russians, and afterward how you found yourself down in Mexico. Next you could tell what you and your friends did along with Billy Junior and your grandchildren, to say nothing of the scraps you were in when you went on that memorable vacation and left Nannie at home. After that you could make a whole lecture on your hairbreadth escape in an aeroplane, what you saw in town and in Panama, on the Mississippi, in the West at the World's Exposition in San Francisco, and last but not least, in Europe during our Great War. And then you might end with our escape from France and the return to America. There would be a wonderful chance for a series of lectures and I bet before the audience heard them all their hair would be standing on end and they would be holding their breath from excitement at your many narrow escapes from death."

Jobs for Selves

"You travel and lecture," Stubby said, "while Button and I will be your press agents and go ahead and find a place for you to lecture in all the big cities and towns. If you did this, then Nannie could travel with you all the time. And I know you would both like that. When, too, you would not grow so restless, as it would keep you on the move all the time, for we would plan it so that you would give only three lectures in any one place and then go on to the next."

"The more I think of it, the more the idea appeals to me," said Button.

"Why not make our journey north into that kind of a trip right now?" said Stubby. "We could send word to Nannie to journey south to meet us."

"It does sound rather attractive," admitted Billy.

"Of course it does!" seconded

Button. "And you owe it to the poor untraveled animals to give out some of your experiences to them, to enlighten their humdrum lives and tell them about the outside world. Just see what a lot of pleasure the Dog and Cat Club gives those stay-at-homes who have never ventured ten blocks from where they were born."

"Hark!" exclaimed Billy. "I hear the most peculiar whistling, whizzing sound. It sounds up in the air, but I can't see a thing."

"It must be an aeroplane then, but I can't see a thing in the sky," said Button; but as he spoke a huge dirigible balloon poked its nose out of a cloud over their heads. It was so directly overhead that they could see every part of it distinctly.

"Isn't it a whale of a balloon? I never saw as large a one, even in Europe," said Billy.

"Nor I, either," said Stubby, full of wonder at its size.

"Look! It is slowly coming to earth. I believe they are going to land over in that clover field," said Button.

And sure enough they did. This great big dirigible, the first of its size to cross the Atlantic Ocean, was landing right before their eyes.

"Let us run over and get as near it as we can," Billy said.

When the monster airship landed the chums went nearer and found it stood tacked in everything as it slowly settled to earth.

Look Inside

Presently little windows and doors were seen to open in its sides and people came walking out. The chums went nearer and found out by the conversation they overheard that they were forced to land as something was the matter with the machinery. The longer Billy looked the more he wanted to see what the dirigible was like on the inside, until at last his curiosity got the better of him and he walked boldly up to the balloon and poked his head in one of the doors and gazed in.

Not being driven away, or seeing anyone, he stepped in and soon was exploring the balloon from one end to the other, with both Stubby and Button at his heels.

A Fine Ship

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Billy. "Just as cozy and nice as a ship that sails the sea. Staterooms,

lounge, dining saloon, kitchen, and storerooms galore! Let's hide and be carried off with her when she starts. It is worth being delayed on our journey to have such an experience."

"Indeed it is!" replied Button. "Quick, get under the table! I hear some one coming," warned Stubby.

Billy dodged under the table in the dining saloon while Stubby hid under a chair and Button ran up a curtain and settled himself on the curtain pole near the ceiling. The persons they had heard coming soon passed through the room, and they came out of their hiding places and continued their explorations.

Presently they found it difficult to stand on their feet, and looking from a window, they discovered they were slowly rising from the ground. At the same time they found it was exceedingly hard to stand still and keep their balance. Before it should grow any worse they ran back and hid where they had before, to await further developments.

Gets Seasick

"I hope if they find us they don't pitch us overboard when they get up two or three thousand feet," said Button.

"Help! Oh, help! I must have some air," whined Stubby. "I am getting seasick!" But neither Billy nor Button heard him, as the noise of the engine and propellers drowned all other sounds in the balloon.

"If there was only a deck I could get out on! I wish I had not come! I just hate this way of traveling! It is worse than being in an elevator in a high building and having the car shoot from the bottom floor to the top in one bound. This thing is worse, for it decides to stop, dropping and shooting up again without warning, and it runs upside down and every other way but straight ahead. Oh, oh, oh! I can't stand it another minute. I must have air!"

So Stubby crawled out from under his chair and climbed up on a long, narrow window seat directly under an open window and lunged out his head. He could only just reach the window by standing on his hind legs, as he was so short and the window ledge was so far above the seat. As he looked out he could see the earth fast receding from him. He felt as if it were the dirigible that was standing still and the earth that was dropping from them.

Way Up High

By this time they were so high in the air that the fields and forests looked like squares on a checkerboard, and the broad rivers were mere silver threads across it. As for the churches and houses, they looked like card houses or toy paper villages. People he could see none; for they were too small to be seen from this height. He became so interested looking that he forgot his seasickness, and he was very much surprised when they ran into a raincloud and he felt the raindrops on his face. But what surprised him most was to see lightning darting all around him, and so near it seemed to go through the dirigible and come out the opposite side. As for the thunder, you people who have never been up in the clouds and heard it close at hand have no idea of the terrific noise and of the terror it causes one.

By this time the big dirigible was foundering in the stormclouds as a ship does in a heavy sea, only ten times more so. A dirigible is lighter than a ship, and the wind at this altitude much stronger. It would catch the balloon up and carry it for miles out of its course one of its fierce currents. Then without warning it would suddenly die down and the big balloon would drop hundreds of feet, only to be caught up by another blast and twirled around or carried up again, as the case might be, while constantly the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled and our chums thought the very next gale would double them up and dash them to their death.

Billy's Troubles

While Stubby was at the window Billy was having his own troubles. He had tried to find a better place to hide than under the table, and had come out to do so when an extra hard lurch of the balloon had sent him headlong the entire length of the dining saloon. He hit his head against the partition at one end of the room and then was flung back to the other end again. As the balloon was changing its course every minute, he could not regain his bearings. One minute the balloon would be standing almost perpendicularly, climbing to higher altitudes to try to get above the stormclouds. The next a heavy gust of wind would drive it back, or the gale would die down altogether and the dirigible would drop into a pocket of the atmosphere, or, worse yet, would be twirled around and around like a ship in a whirlpool of water.

TERRIBLE

The young married woman went home to her mother and sobbingly declared she just couldn't be happy with her husband again.

"I wouldn't have minded it so much, mother," she wailed. "If Charlie had answered me back when I scolded him, bu-bu—but he did something worse."

Her mother was duly shocked at this.

"Mercy! my dear child," she exclaimed. "He struck you, then?"

"No, worse than that, mother"—and the young wife sobbed afresh. "Tell me at once!" indignantly demanded her mother.

"He—he just yawned."

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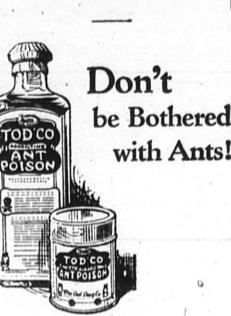
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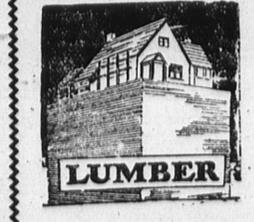


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